AUSTRALIA’S CAPABILITY IN
FASHION DESIGN
AND ADVANCED
TEXTILES
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INTRODUCTION

Australia is a leader in the fashion design, textiles and apparels sector. Supported by prominent education and research institutions, the Australian industry is driving advances across design, textile innovation and fabric development.

With a wide range of internationally successful companies, Australian textile and apparel businesses are familiar with the challenges of operating in a global industry valued at US$3 trillion.\(^1\)

Shifts in consumer demand patterns, new distribution models and the increased role of advanced technologies are creating international opportunities where Australia has a competitive advantage.

Examples of Australian diversification and innovation include the fire-resistant textile technologies developed by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) and a denim dyeing project at Deakin University to increase the global sustainability of one of the world’s most popular clothing items.

Some examples of internationally successful Australian fashion companies include Cotton On Group (Cotton On, Supre, Ruby and Factorie); Specialty Fashion Group (Millsers, Crossroads, Katies, Rivers, City Chic); Country Road Group (Country Road, Mimco, Politix, Trenery and Witchery) and Premier Investments (Smiggle, Just Jeans, Portmans, Peter Alexander, dotti, and Jacquié-E).

This industry capability statement provides an overview of Australian capability in fashion design, innovative textiles and apparel, including examples of some of the many Australian companies with specialist expertise.

Talk to your local Austrade representative for more tailored advice and information on connecting and partnering with this industry.
INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

Leading design, textile innovation and fabric development

The Australian textile and apparel industry plays a substantial role across the economy including in design, education, fibre production, services, research and technology.

Australia’s experience in fibre production, design and research underpins our capability in this sector. Historically known for its success through leading surf and activewear companies such as Billabong, Rip Curl and more recently Lorna Jane, Australia’s reputation as a healthy, active society has contributed to its impact in international markets.

The industry is continually diversifying, and has shifted Australia’s position to an innovator of smart textiles, high-quality fibres, leading design education and unique fabric development. Government organisations such as CSIRO and major universities like RMIT and Deakin University are at the forefront of this. Australian businesses are utilising new technologies to develop and complement their product offering, often partnering with innovators. The Skins partnership with Deakin University to analyse human sweat conditions for their compression garments is a prime example.

The industry is poised for a dynamic period ahead with increased demand from the growing middle-class of Asian markets, significant growth in e-commerce globally, improvements in textile technology, innovative fabrics and world-class education capabilities.

Australia’s 27 years of uninterrupted economic growth has given rise to innovative new businesses that are building their international reputations with global supply chains. Australia is well positioned in this changing environment with a flexible industry and strong creative talent.

KEY INDUSTRY FACTS

$5 BILLION WORTH OF EXPORTS IN FASHION

$12 BILLION CONTRIBUTION TO THE AUSTRALIAN ECONOMY

220,000 STRONG WORKFORCE

$2.9 BILLION IN WOOL EXPORTS

$2.5 BILLION IN COTTON EXPORTS
Excellence in advanced textiles

The Australian advanced textile industry benefits from an integrated design capability through its universities, industrial design and vibrant local fashion. This is supported by the development of natural fibres which enables fast product development and strong end-user focus. With high-tech and flexible manufacturing, developments are assisted by small runs, prototyping and mass customisation capability.

Australia has developed some of the world’s best natural fibres through continued research and development. The Woolmark company runs an international fashion award – the International Woolmark Prize – to further the innovation of wool fabrics.

The CSIRO and the NSW Department of Agriculture have a program to continually improve Australia’s cotton production, focused on water usage, pest management and cotton quality. This research investment underpins the Australian cotton industry, and the industry is recognised as a world leader in the adoption of technology, innovation, environmental management and the production of high-quality, high-yielding cotton.

With technology that is globally relevant to Australia’s advanced textiles industry, the future of textiles has an international outlook. Companies and research institutions are well connected and highly capable of collaborating across borders and between markets.

For example, RMIT University’s Centre for Materials Innovation and Future Fashion (CMIFF) draws together the end-user design focus with textile technology to solve industry problems. This includes developments that protect cyclists from grazing injuries while maintaining comfort and performance, and car seat covers that operate safely in tandem with airbags.

Australian advanced textiles companies are focused on the integration of smart and functionalised textiles into future applications. This includes the Internet of Things, healthcare and high performance apparel. Companies are collaborating with Australian universities and research institutes in the development of new materials and their application into textile substrates and real products that are valued by end users.

Some examples include:

› Imagine Intelligent Materials has developed sensing materials by incorporating graphene, a two-dimensional sheet of carbon atoms, into textiles. Imagine Intelligent Materials is working with a number of Australian universities towards a world that is seamlessly connected by intelligent materials that respond to their environment through convergence with electronics (e.g. clothes that make a phone call by connecting materials to devices – made possible through graphene’s electrical conductivity).

› Textor Technologies, a high-volume non-woven healthcare fabrics manufacturer, has partnered with Australia’s CSIRO to develop the 3D UltraAbsorb technology for inclusion in Kimberly-Clark baby nappies. This technology draws wetness away from the skin leaving it dry. It is now being exported around the world into the growing baby diaper market.

› The Institute for Frontier Materials (IFM) at Deakin University won the Global Change Award in 2017 for innovation in fashion, presented by the H&M Foundation in Sweden. The award was for the development of a new denim dyeing process that reduces water usage by up to 2,000 litres per garment. IFM is also the home of Carbon Nexus, a purpose-built research facility for carbon fibre, partnering with key local and global composite companies.
MACGRAW LABEL CREATES A WINNING WAY WITH AUSTRALIAN MERINO WOOL

Case study
Beth and Tessa MacGraw launched their label macgraw in April 2012. The sisters have since carved their place in the Australian designer landscape with a keen eye for beautiful fabrications in wearable silhouettes.

The designers created a new technique with merino wool, a superfine 100% merino lace that doesn’t crease. macgraw worked closely with a Swiss guipure manufacturer, a leading lace supplier to fashion houses including Gucci, to create a world first – lace made from superfine Australian merino wool rather than cotton or polyester.

“It took some convincing but they finally agreed to work with us,” said Tessa MacGraw. “They had to pull aside a Schiffli machine from their regular order run to test different weights and thicknesses of wool because they usually use cotton, silk and polyester yarns.”

Success was finally achieved with a superfine 2/80 yarn that was used to create a lace that doesn’t crease, has a unique drape, and the warmth and comfort of merino.

This innovation is now being offered to luxury design houses worldwide. “They developed an entirely new way of producing wool,” said IWP judge and netaporter founder Natalie Massenet. “We’ll be able to wear lace in winter and still be warm. To a girl that’s a dream come true.”

macgraw debuted at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Australia in April 2014 to critical acclaim. Elle Australia labeled them ‘designers you need to know’. The label now shows annually at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, supporting showrooms in Paris and NYC.

In 2016, macgraw won four of Australia’s top design awards. These included the Tiffany & Co. National Designer Award, the BT Award, the Regional International Woolmark Prize and the Australian Fashion Laureate for Best Emerging Designer.

In four years, macgraw has attracted a strong fan base of luxury dressers who appreciate easy yet unique and detail-oriented design. The brand counts Lorde, Banks, Karlie Kloss and Coco Rocha as fans and has enjoyed a nod of approval from Harper’s Bazaar USA, which after meeting the designers, published an article entitled ‘Meet the Aussie brand that will make your summer’.

In early 2017 in Paris, the designers presented a capsule Woolmark collection to an esteemed industry panel comprising Dame Natalie Massenet, Bouchra Jarrar of Lanvin and Victoria Beckham.

Despite overseas expansion and international success, macgraw maintains a proudly Australian attitude that the sisters believe gives them a global advantage when it comes to professionalism and personality.

“Australians in general are positive people with a strong work ethic; people overseas really gravitate to that,” said Beth MacGraw. “In a design context, there is a sense of ease in our silhouettes that also comes from being Australian.”

macgraw.com.au
Australia's capability in fashion design and advanced textiles

RMIT DEVELOPS ABRASION-RESISTANT KNITTED FABRICS FOR ATHLETES

Case study

RMIT University’s Centre for Materials Innovation and Future Fashion (CMIFF) has been working with Australian company GRT P/L to provide improved crash protection for leading competition cyclists and athletes.

The project has investigated how cyclists can be better protected against abrasions should they fall and slide along a road surface. Grazing injuries are often severe and debilitating, with removal of skin and under-tissue over significant areas of the body.

The existing commercially available cycling garments provided no abrasion protection as they are designed for streamlined comfort and minimal effect on the performance of the cyclist. International rules also preclude the coverage of knees and elbows.

GRT requested that RMIT develop suitable knitted fabrics providing significantly improved abrasion protection, with all the other functions of the fabrics and garments unaffected. The material needed to be fully coloured and able to be printed on. Ideally, it would also provide some degree of moisture management and control over thermal performance.

The fabric manufacture was carried out by RMIT’s expert knitting technicians, based on a variety of CMIFF designs. As part of this process, a customised abrasion test machine was developed in RMIT’s CMIFF laboratories to test the specific fabric problems and conditions. This machine was based on the existing international standards used to evaluate motorcycle gear.

RMIT evaluated the test results and adapted the fabric designs and manufacture processes so that after each evaluation, steady improvements in abrasion performance were achieved until an optimum set of design criteria were formulated.

A suite of the best-performing fabrics were then taken by GRT to a leading global sports/activewear brand. The brand identified a range of additional applications for the new fabric technology that could benefit other items in their product ranges.

The first product using this abrasion protection technology was released in September 2016. Since then a range of other products using the innovation has been developed in partnership with all three parties.

rmit.edu.au/research/research-institutes-centres-and-groups/research-centres/cmiff
Australia's strengths in fashion have evolved due to global factors such as fashion’s approach to seasonality and changing operational systems. This includes technological changes, the segmentation of authoritative voices across fashion such as bloggers, the escalation of social media as well as the increasing trend of demand for unique, high-quality products. Traditionally, Australia’s contribution to the global market was largely the provision of primary products without much high value-add or creative segmentation.

Now Australia’s strong design education sector attracts students from around the world and has produced a number of talented designers who are globally renowned. Examples include ZIMMERMAN, Toni Maticevski, Dion Lee, Ellery, Tome, Camilla Franks, Bec and Bridge, bassike, Jac and Jack and many more. A cohort of designers now successfully bring different perspectives and aesthetics to what it means to be an Australian designer. According to the Business of Fashion ranking of the top 50 schools, Australia’s design schools rank among the best globally with RMIT at 17, the Fashion Design Studio at 23 and UTS at 28.2

Deakin University’s Centre for Advanced Design in Engineering Training (CADET) is leading a new era in engineering and industrial design education in Australia. The $55 million state-of-the-art facility houses some of the most advanced and future-focused simulation and visualisation systems, purpose-built interactive laboratories and learning environments in the country, utilising technologies such as 3D printing.
ZIMMERMAN EXPANDS INTO THE AMERICAN MARKET

Case study

ZIMMERMANN is an iconic Australian brand founded by Sydney sisters Nicky and Simone Zimmerman in 1991.

Early in its evolution, ZIMMERMANN took the bold step of fusing fashion with swimwear and presented it to the world. It immediately found its following with the fashion elite. While the swimsuit thrust ZIMMERMANN on to the international stage, it’s the consistent collections across its ready-to-wear and resort wear that have propelled it to greater global appeal. In 2016 they sealed a venture capital deal with growth equity firm General Atlantic and are planning to open four new stores in the United States and further wholesale opportunities.

While based in Sydney, ZIMMERMANN present their ready-to-wear collections each season at New York Fashion Week. They maintain showrooms in Sydney, London, New York and Los Angeles. In Australia and abroad the label receives extensive editorial coverage and has graced the pages of magazines including Vogue, Harpers Bazaar, Elle, W, Glamour, Nylon and Marie Claire.

ZIMMERMANN maintains a number of stand-alone stores across Australia and the US including flagship stores on Mercer St in New York and Melrose Place in Los Angeles.

ZIMMERMANN has been the recipient of multiple fashion awards including the Australian Fashion Laureate and Best Swim Designer – Prix de Marie Claire, to name a few. Nicky has been a member of the Australian Fashion Week Advisory Board and the Australian Fashion Chamber. Nicky and Simone have also been fashion mentors for the Qantas Spirit of Australia Youth Awards.

zimmermannwear.com
Contact your local Austrade representative for assistance with connecting with the Australian businesses that best suit your requirements.

austrade.gov.au

Australian Fashion Council
ausfashioncouncil.com

Woolmark
woolmark.com

Australian Wool Innovation
wool.com

Cotton Australia
cottonaustralia.com.au

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
dfat.gov.au

Creative Victoria
creative.vic.gov.au

Fashion Council WA
fashioncouncilwa.com.au

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ABOUT AUSTRADE

The Australian Trade and Investment Commission – Austrade – contributes to Australia’s economic prosperity by helping Australian businesses, education institutions, tourism operators, governments and citizens as they:

› develop international markets
› win productive foreign direct investment
› promote international education
› strengthen Australia’s tourism industry
› seek consular and passport services.

Austrade helps companies around the world to identify and take up investment opportunities in Australia as well as to source Australian goods and services. Our assistance includes:

› providing insight on Australian capabilities
› identifying potential investment projects and strategic alliance partners
› helping you identify and contact Australian suppliers.

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2. As above.
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